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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 003897

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SUBJECT: LY RACE TIGHTENS IN TAICHUNG CITY

REF: TAIPEI 03466

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reason 1.4 (B/D)

¶11. (C) Summary: With three days left before election day, the field of viable candidates for the eight Legislative Yuan (LY) seats in the battleground city of Taichung has narrowed to nine from eighteen (See Reftel). Although the Pan-Blue camp appears poised to retain the four seats it won in the 2001 election, the new seat added to Taichung City this year will probably go to the Pan-Green (if the Green-leaning independent is counted in the Green camp), changing the Pan-Blue four-to-three advantage into a four-four draw. However, one KMT incumbent is overwhelmingly popular and may draw too many votes away the weakest of her ticketmates. The Blue to Green balance could tilt three to five, but such an outcome remains only a small possibility. End Summary.

Narrowing Field: 3 Candidates Fight for 2 Seats

¶12. (C) Since AIT last visited Taichung City in early November, the field of viable candidates has narrowed to four Pan-Greens, an independent who is a former Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Taichung mayor, and four Pan-Blues. Of these nine candidates, six are safely assured of seats, leaving the remaining three to fight for the last two seats. The two DPP incumbents, Shieh Ming-yuan and Lee Ming-hsien, are running strong campaigns and likely to win. All local observers told AIT that the independent, Chang Wen-ying, is highly popular and should also easily secure a seat. Both media and KMT internal party polls provided to AIT place Chang among the top three slots. KMT incumbent Lu Shio-wen is consistently in the top position and both the People First Party (PFP) candidates in the upper-middle of the pack round out the six assured winners. The race for the remaining two seats boils down to a contest between the DPP newcomer Wang Shih-shun, Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU) incumbent Ho Min-hao, and KMT newcomer Tsai Jin-lung.

An Independent Squeezes the Greens

¶13. (C) Chang Wen-ying's continued prominence and popularity has made it much more difficult for the Pan-Green to ensure victory for all four of its nominees (one TSU and three DPP). The official Pan-Green candidates will most likely take three seats. DPP Taichung City Chairman Chen Da-jun on December 1 estimated that Chang is getting half her support from Pan-Green voters, reducing the pool of votes available to the DPP and TSU. Although Chen said 30 percent of DPP voters in Taichung are willing to participate in vote distribution, versus 10 percent for the KMT, Chen assessed that the DPP nominees lack a large enough vote pool to allow the weakest two to secure seats. The DPP has included the TSU incumbent, Ho Min-hao, in its vote distribution plans

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and, according to Chen, Ho and DPP newcomer Wang Shih-shun will be fighting for the eighth seat, which Ho is likely to win. DPP Survey Center Director Pan I-hsuan confirmed Chen's assessment on December 2.

KMT's One Weak Link

¶14. (C) Although the KMT has been conservative in its nominations in Taichung, newcomer Tsai Jin-lung is in danger of not winning a seat if votes are not distributed from the popular front-runner Lu Shio-wen. Taichung City Mayor Jason Hu told AIT that the KMT has done extensive polling in the city and found that 18 and 29 percent of Lu supporters are very willing or somewhat willing to distribute votes. The party estimates that if both those groups distribute their votes, Tsai Jin-lung, who is on the borderline, will move up into the sixth position, pushing down the DPP's Shieh Ming-yuan to seven and forcing the DPP's Wang or the TSU's Ho into eight. Even with a lower participation rate, Mayor Hu was still optimistic Tsai would come in seventh or eighth, displacing one of the lower ranked Green candidates. Hung Chao-nan, the incumbent KMT legislator who decided not to stand again this year, was considerably less optimistic. Hung told AIT that Lu Shio-wen's Mainlander supporters would never vote for the Taiwanese Tsai. Hung said his own local

Taiwanese KMT supporters have not warmed up to Tsai.

PFP Daniel Hwang: The Comeback Kid

15. (C) The PFP in Taichung city, unlike elsewhere, is in a relatively comfortable position. Both of its candidates, Daniel Hwang (Yih-jiau) and Shen Chih-hwei, are running strongly in the polls and do not have overlapping bases of support, said PFP Taichung City Chairman Lin Ping-yuan. Hwang, a handsome and charismatic incumbent running for a third term, has city-wide support from many white-collar professionals and young female voters. Shen is a veteran lawmaker who is running on her constituent service record and enjoys support from the city's large number of retired military families. Lin said both are not in danger of losing their seats and the PFP has no plans to distribute votes between them or with the KMT.

Comment: A Draw, of Sorts?

16. (C) AIT's contacts in Taichung clearly see independent Chang Wei-ying as a Pan-Green, and Chang offered this past weekend to re-join the party after the election. With Chang assured of a seat, the most likely outcome in Taichung is a four-four distribution of seats between the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green camps. AIT's local Pan-Blue contacts have already begun to portray such an outcome as a "success" for the local party establishment and a sign they can hold their own against the Greens. A four-four draw, however, actually means an extra seat for the Pan-Green side and another step closer to their goal of a legislative majority.

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